

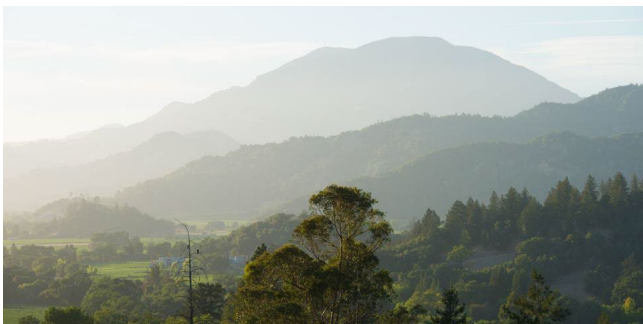
## Exploring The Cabernet Sauvignon Of Napa Valley, Part Six

Brian Freedman | Spirits | June 3, 2021

Over the course of the previous five installments of this series on Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, I've focused on various specific appellations, trying to contextualize them in order to demonstrate what makes the wines from each unique. This final one, on Cabs labeled as simply Napa Valley, as opposed to any of the specific nested AVAs, is inherently problematic: Wines labeled as Napa Valley encompass a sweeping range of soils, micro-climates, geological histories, elevations, and more. In that regard, it's just not possible to tie them all together in any satisfactory way.

To help shed some light on Napa Valley as a whole, I spoke with Vinous founder and CEO Antonio Galloni, who is not only one of the most important critics in the world of wine in general—his expertise literally spans the globe—but whose Vinous Napa Valley Vineyard Maps, done with critic and cartographer Alessandro Masnagheti, are the most comprehensive and educational I've ever seen.

"The reason why I started to do those maps back in 2011," he said, "is that I was tasting wines for Robert Parker [of The Wine Advocate]," and realized that, "if you woke up on the valley floor, you think you were tasting in Piedmont" from all of the fog. "And if you drive up to Pritchard Hill, it's dry and sunny—and this is the same day."



The range of elevation in Napa Valley plays a significant role in the ultimate character of the wines. ROBERT MCCLLENANHAN

Altitude, it turns out, isn't just a defining characteristic of certain mountain appellations—Howell Mountain AVA, for example, begins at 1,400 feet above sea level; anything below that height is classified as simply Napa Valley—but also a key one in parts of Napa that we don't usually associate with any sort of elevation.

"When you look at the existing AVAs, there are a whole bunch of areas that get left off, often because of altitude," Galloni explained. "Rutherford's a good example," since its regulations require grapes to be grown between 155 and 500 feet above sea level. Any vineyards planted above 500 feet, even if they're otherwise inside the AVA's boundaries, are technically not part of the Rutherford appellation, and fall under the more general Napa Valley AVA instead.

"Napa Valley AVA, if you look at our map...there are a lot of vineyards that are outside of the dotted line," Galloni pointed out. "It's mostly just a question of elevation." In other words, he told me, Cabernets labeled as Napa Valley AVA could be a mountain wine, a hillside wine, or valley floor wine, grown just outside of an AVA's proscribed boundaries or elevations.

As a result, he said, "It's impossible to say that Napa Valley has 'this' characteristic," no matter how frequently the region as a whole is discussed in sweepingly monolithic terms.

The complexity of the region is incredible.

"What is Napa Valley? It's a valley with mountain ranges on either side, and really interesting vineyards in that sort of transition," Galloni continued. "If you look in the west . . . that's where you have Harlan Estate and Futo...and if you go to the transitional areas, that's where you have Inglenook, Scarecrow." Heading further east, he added, "you have the most fertile land in the middle...and on the other side, you have Dalla Valle, Peter Michael," and other east valley standouts. "It's a lifetime of trying to understand this," he said.

With that in mind, here is a selection of 32 wines, from between 2016 and 2018, that exemplify the incredible range of styles and expressions that the region is capable of, even when labeled simply as Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

### Post & Beam Cabernet Sauvignon 2018 Napa Valley

Generous aromatics of chocolate-enrobed cherries and a hint of blueberries marked by the sweet vanilla of oak. The palate is very velvety, with black currants and boysenberries sweetly spiced with vanilla, chocolate, and clove, as well as an undertow of pencil shavings. Drink over the next few years.